

FRAME

‘Walking
through the
haze towards
the light’

16 Striking
Stands

The Great Indoors

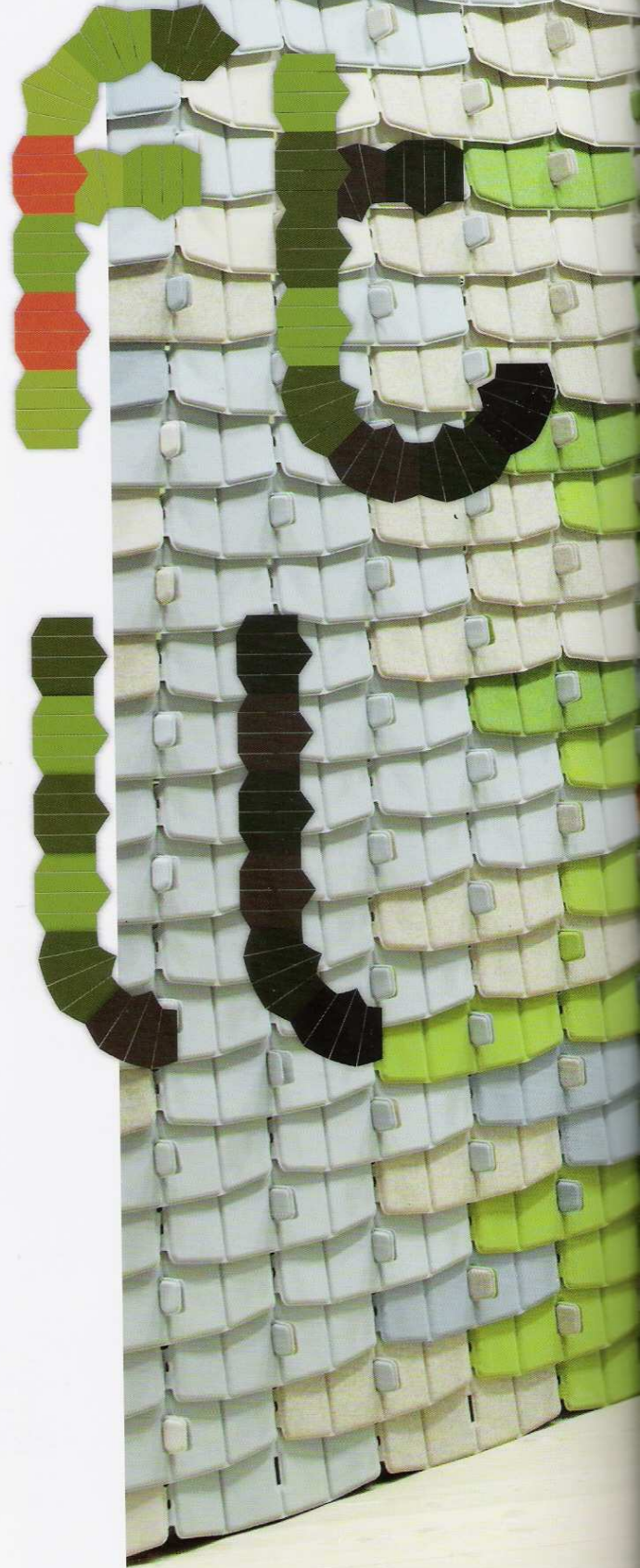
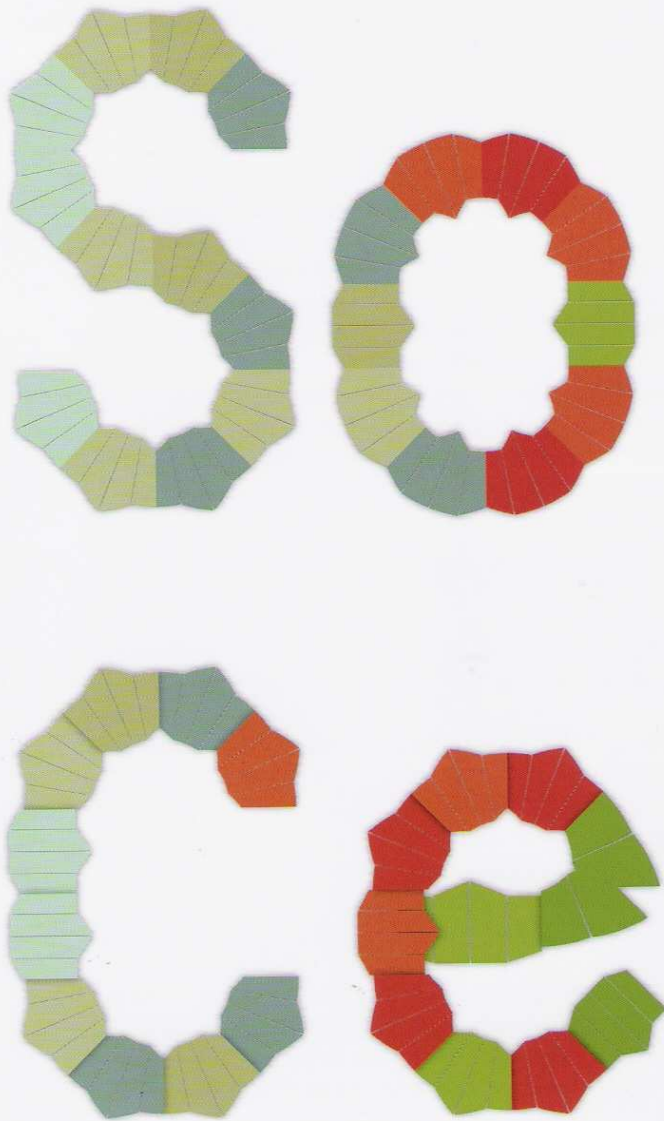
SPEX

The Designer Map of
Salone del Mobile



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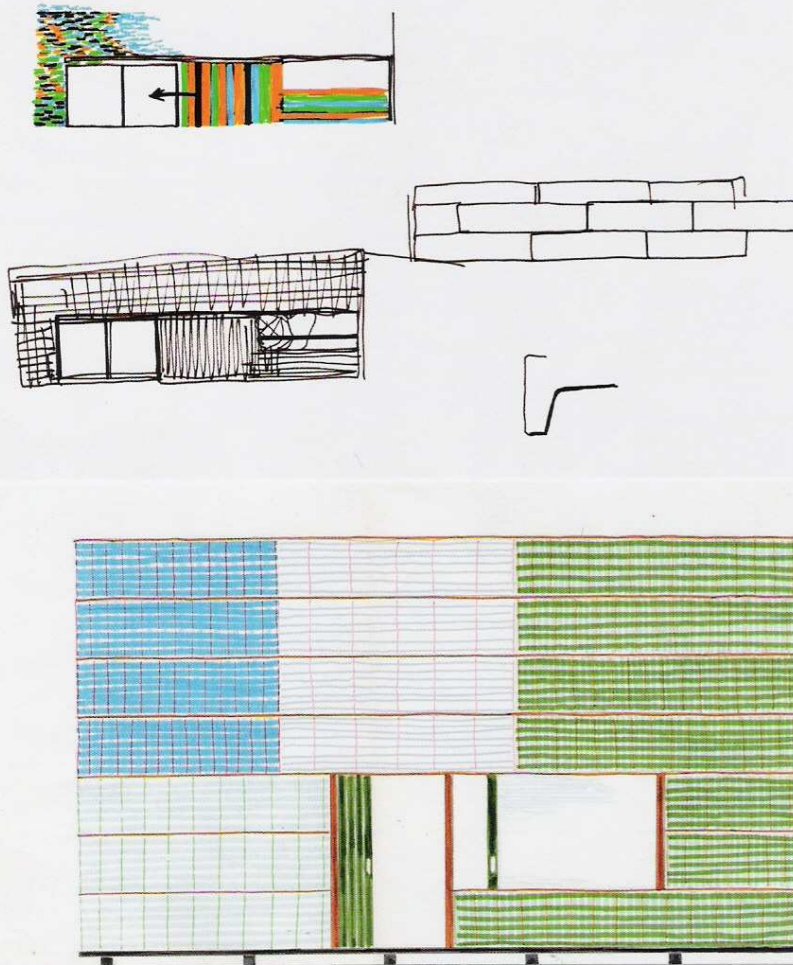


The latest instalment
in the Bouroullecs'
exploration of the poetics
of partitioning produces
a soft showcase for textile
manufacturer Kvadrat.

Text by Laurence Salmon
Photography by Paul Tahon



No fewer than 1800 m of fabric in 15 colourways were used by the Bouroullecs in the Kvadrat showroom



Learning from history. Doorframes fitted with sliding panels echo the sliding partitions perfected in traditional Japanese architecture. Likewise, fabric walls have precedents in the draperies, damasks and tapestries of European palaces.

Amid the tidy interior of their new workshop – which is tucked inside a courtyard far from the madding crowd of Paris's Belleville district – it's the first thing one sees: an astonishing textile wall of pixelated colours. It hangs more than 5 m above the floor, with a height gauge at its base to measure any stretch. 'We worked long and hard with an engineer to validate resistance, see how the material would deform, and find the perfect level of tension,' says Ronan Bouroullec, referring to the flexible partition created for Kvadrat's new showroom in Stockholm. Very rarely do Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec make installations for specific locations. The first and only other time was in 2000, when the brothers were commissioned by Japanese fashion designer Issey Miyake to create a backdrop for the A-POC collection at his boutique in the French capital's rue Vieille du Temple (*Frame 18*, page 76). 'Interior design is not our number-one interest. We are, first and foremost, industrial designers. Designing a product means carrying out the research needed to ensure that the finished object corresponds to the original intention. Interior-design projects have a much tighter timescale, so the initial work has to be done more quickly.'

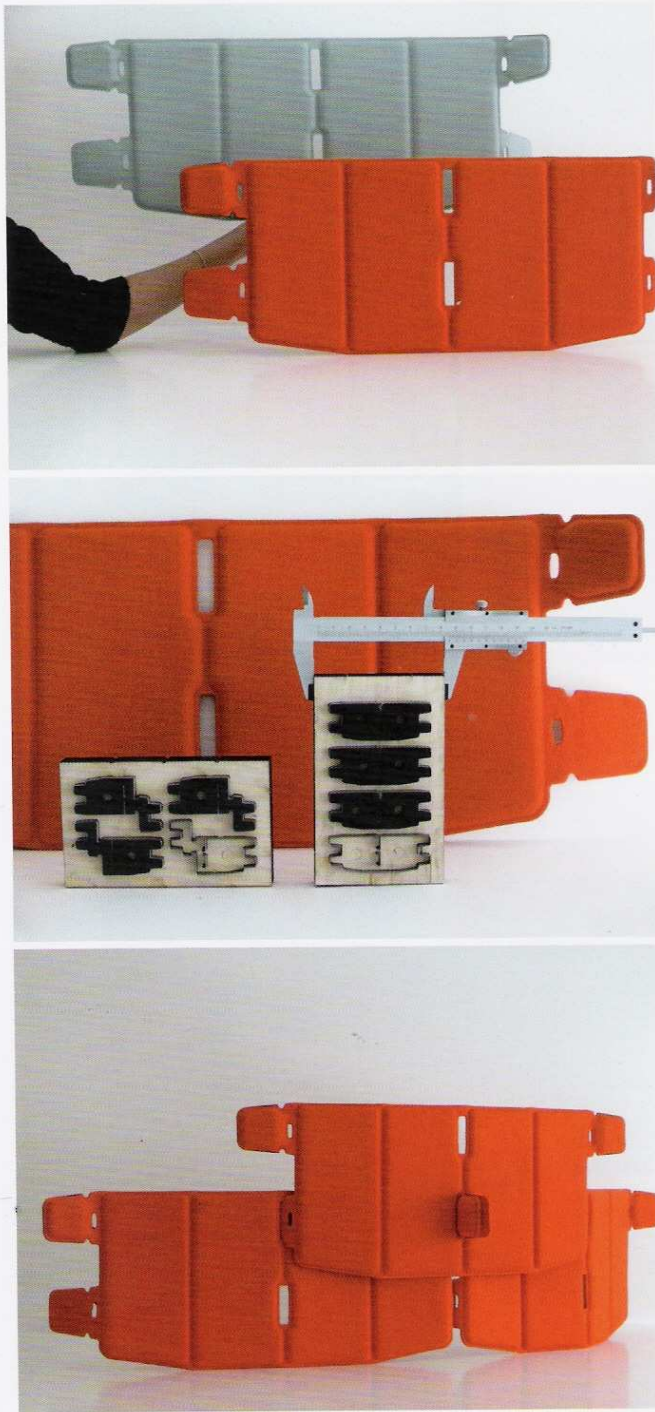
'We made it clear that we were proposing a principle rather than a place.'

Erwan & Ronan Bouroullec

The Bouroullecs have little time for what they refer to as 'limited-life-cycle installations' and interiors in which brands use the name of a well-known designer to get their message across. Not wanting to be associated with such phenomena, they had systematically rejected any proposals that might take them down that road. They also had a policy of turning down anything that would put them in direct competition with other designers. It took the persuasive powers of someone of the calibre of Miyake to overcome their reluctance the first time around. And only the renown and contemporary image of Denmark's Kvadrat – a manufacturer of textiles since the 1960s and the darling of furniture-makers the world over – could convince the Bouroullecs to give it a second try. They were given free rein, with one condition: they were to showcase Kvadrat's products as part of the interior design.

The project provided them with a great opportunity to work with textile, a material that has captured their interest of late. 'We are integrating textile into our projects more and more often,' says Ronan. 'We just bought a digital sewing machine and are starting to experiment.' The Kvadrat commission is the logical follow-up to a story that began with the Facett armchair for French furniture manufacturer Roset (*Frame 45*, page 132), which they designed using a digitally controlled quilting machine, and that continued with Tube, an interesting garden chair of woven chain mail for Vitra, which was exhibited at last year's furniture fair in Milan.





Tiles consist of a hard-foam core laminated between two layers of fabric: the Bouroullecs' uniquely toasted sandwich. Each tile resembles a puzzle piece that sports four protruding ears and two slits. The ears slot into the slits of adjacent tiles, making it possible to construct a large quilt of interconnected tiles.

For the Kvadrat showroom, the brothers drew inspiration from a technique used in the car industry to make internal door panels. It takes just 15 seconds and the push of a button to cut and thermoform a module composed of a polyethylene sponge core sandwiched between two layers of textile. The Bouroullecs discovered the potential of this technique for use in furniture manufacturing when making cushions for their Striped collection for Magis. They've taken it one step further this time, designing a 'textile tile', as they call the 50-x-25-cm panel whose contours are formed to enable easy assembly. Four lateral slats are used to assemble the tiles via an ingenious folding system that dispenses with the need for any external mechanical element. It took a year of effort and multiple trials to come up with this clever solution, as exemplified by the mini-tiles cut using the cutting die that Ronan showed us in the workshop.

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Erwan & Ronan Bouroullec

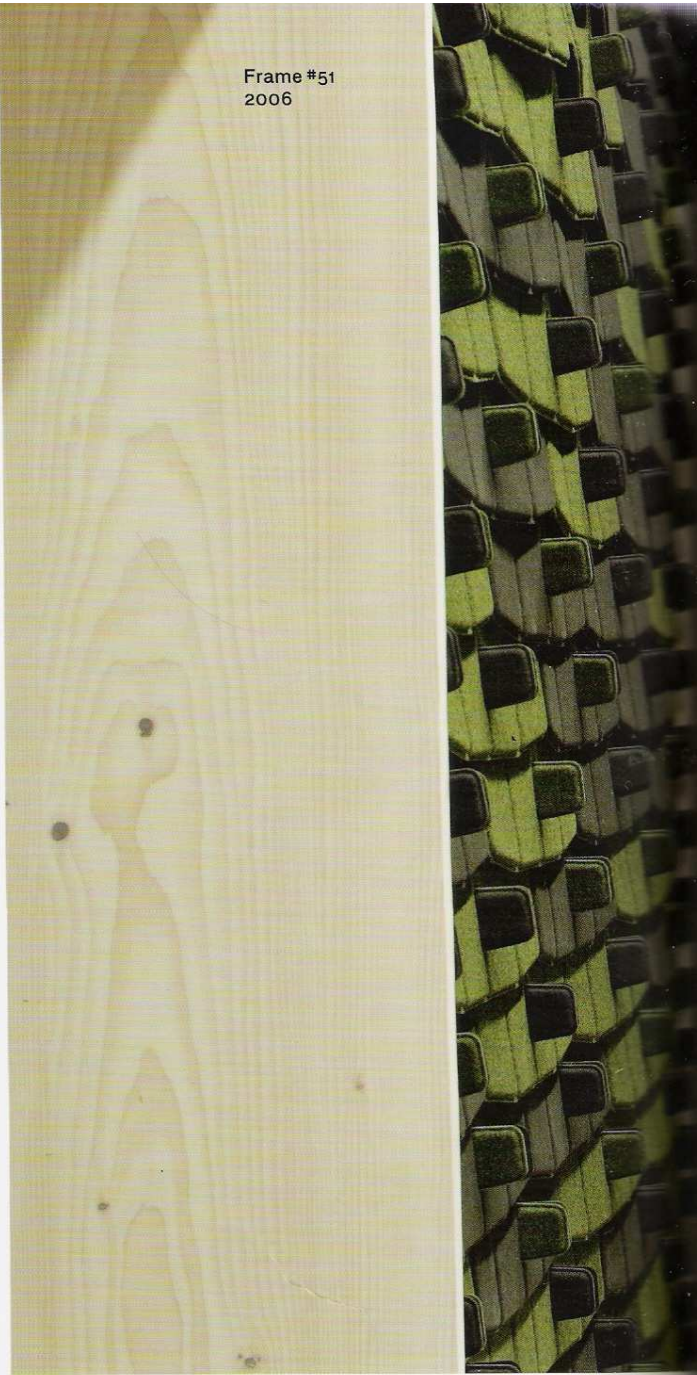
The brothers were quick to realize that their tile would be the ideal solution for showcasing the textures and colours of the Kvadrat range, as well as for refurbishing the 250-m² former industrial building in Stockholm (an old spinning mill on Södermalm Island) that was to accommodate the project. 'We were lucky to be working in a neutral space – a big, bland, white volume that needed to be divided into zones: one for displaying the textiles, two offices and a storage space.'

Partitioning the premises with the use of textiles was the obvious approach. The Bouroullecs have extensive experience with partitions. 'It's one of our favourite areas of work. There's a whole history there, from Japanese partitions to moucharaby, all the way back to Indian partitions made of latticework marble.' The Lit Clos sleeping cabin (2000), one of their first contributions to the history of design, was based on the idea of partitions and separation. Separation without enclosure is a principle they used in designing subsequent products, including polystyrene modules Brick (2000) and Nuages (2002), not to mention Algues (2004), the injected-polypropylene branches manufactured by Vitra that are proliferating throughout the world of interior design. Almost 500,000 units have been sold – a success story sure to be repeated with Tiles, the



The textile wall by the Bouroullecs for Kvadrat is a jigsaw made up of identically sized puzzle pieces that differ in colour and material only.

Walls form a catalogue of wool fabrics by Kvadrat, including Steelcut by Giulio Ridolfo and Frans Dijkmeijer; and Magenta, Divina and Divina Melange by Finn Sködt.



innovative feature of the brothers' installation for Kvadrat. Indeed, the Bouroullecs make no secret of their goal, which is to turn Tiles into an industrial product. 'Kvadrat got the message right away. From the very first meeting, we made it clear that we were proposing a principle rather than a place.' Quick to understand how versatile the finished product could be, Kvadrat saw that Tiles would give architects a flexible alternative to conventional walls – textile as a substitute for plasterboard, for example.

A great advantage lies in the simplicity of the design. It took only five days for Perrine, the Bouroullecs' assistant, and two trainees to assemble the textile partitions in the Stockholm showroom and to suspend them 5 m above the floor from a system of ceiling-mounted rails. A piece of cake and a stunning result. The texture and sound-insulation properties of these long, flexible membranes recall the special ambience created by Beuys's felt installations, with colour thrown in for good measure. The partitions appear to shimmer with pixelated colour, and although they have no particular theory on colour, this project features a recognizable, rather '70s palette expressed through a chiaroscuro of varying density. 'We used computer-aided

design to position the tiles one by one, so as to create mosaics,' says Ronan. In the darker corners, greens shimmer with added intensity before giving way to lighter tones – from grey to blue to white – as one gets closer to broad windows letting in the subtle Scandinavian light.

The focal point of the showroom is a large table (Joyn, Vitra) surrounded by Thonet 209 armchairs (a favourite of Le Corbusier). The space is bathed in a creamy light infused with the calm that customers need when selecting textiles. The Bouroullec brothers created two display units, one of which is a long case illuminated by neutral fluorescent lighting and equipped with a magnetic board that holds a customer's choice of samples.

The Bouroullecs have a liking for primary shapes, and the cube is a leitmotif in their designs. A good example is their Butterfly collection for Cappellini (2002). At Kvadrat, the back-to-basics approach is seen in the furniture and in the symbolism behind the transition from one zone to another. The tiles are modular by their very nature, implying that the space can be reformatted ad infinitum, an idea repeated in transition-zone elements that can also be repositioned: wide, simple, open boxes that resemble



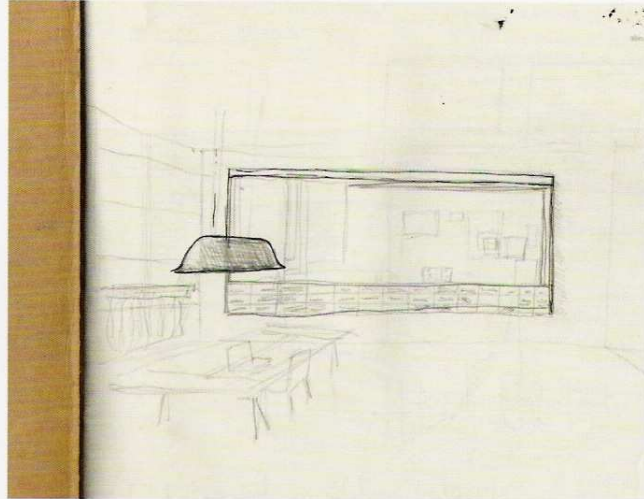
doorframes. Each frame has a sliding textile screen that can be paired with an additional glass screen for better insulation, especially when used for office doors.

‘Multiplying, reproducing
in series: that’s the
basis of our work.’

Erwan & Ronan Bouroullec

The reference to things Japanese is obvious. ‘We were invited to the home of Isamu Noguchi,’ says Ronan, ‘where we saw how height differences can be used to create an added sensation of transition.’ At the showroom, transition zones, furniture and floor are all made of the same material: magnificent Douglas pine that has been soap-bleached using a Swedish technique. The extraordinarily





long, broad panels of pine (Dinesen), combined with the landscape of multicoloured tiles, make for a particularly lively environment. It's a million miles away from the cold, artificial spaces and hollow, empty interiors stamped 'design' that make the Bouroullecs shudder.

The showroom, which opened in February, has become the talk of Stockholm. Certain ideas used there have been introduced into another Bouroullec project: the restaurant for the Museum of Modern Art Grand-Duc Jean in Luxembourg (to be opened in July 2006). Ronan and Erwan's textile tiles will cover the light, tentlike structure of the restaurant, a facility that adds a human dimension to I.M. Pei's monumental museum. True to perfectionist form, the Bouroullecs have added a few finishing touches to the system used to mount the tiles and have ironed out a slight problem involving pinpricks of light that were penetrating the textile partition. All improvements are aimed at making the product industrially manufacturable as soon as possible. That's the key motivation driving the two brothers and one they cannot stress enough: 'Multiplying, reproducing in series: that's the basis of our work.'

The main space of the Kvadrat showroom. Contrasting with the colourful fabrics are Douglas fir planks supplied by Danish firm Dinesen, which are used for floors, counter tops, doorframes and the shelving unit that holds the fabric samples.